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Articles in Today's Clips Wednesday, November 28, 2007

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MIRS

November 26, 2007

Media Learns Of Child Deaths Under State Custody

Rep. David **LAW** (R-Commerce Twp.) hit the media jackpot today at his special task force on the unreported number of children who die under state care, drawing a surprising large amount of coverage from television, radio and print media. Typically, minority party events struggle to attract more than two reporters.

The task force met this morning on the Capitol's 4th floor on a day when the House was holding afternoon session and virtually nothing else was going on to draw the press' attention.

Another reason the event may have attracted so much attention was that task force was featuring the testimony of Supreme Court Justice Maura **CORRIGAN**, who like Law has taken a strong interest in child protection issues in the last several years.

The thrust of Law and Corrigan's comments today focused on the disturbing number of children whose deaths while under state care go unreported.

"It's not only those in our foster care system, it's also children who die after they've been in our court system or those that die after having any kind of contact with Child Protective Services (CPS)," Corrigan said.

At one point in her testimony, Corrigan said she wasn't sure how many children under state care die each year, but she said the most recent information she'd seen was 58 (it wasn't clear which year) and that

didn't count any who died after their case had been closed.

She also mentioned two children she knew of who had died of cancer after the state delayed approval of

chemotherapy because the foster parent wasn't allowed to sign-off on the procedure.

"I think we really should pass legislation authorizing foster parents to approve non-emergency procedures," Corrigan said.

According to Corrigan, the lack of coordinated information flow is a huge problem. Even high-ranking court officials like Corrigan herself have to resort to news media accounts to find out about many of the deaths. She also alluded to the possibility that some of the deaths may not even receive much news media attention.

Corrigan outlined what she said she believes should be legislative priorities to help protect the children of Michigan.

1. To set up an independent oversight body to look into the deaths of children who were under state care.

She said this body should be isolated as much as possible from political pressures.

2. A single repository of information on those who die while under state care. According to Corrigan, there are various entities that receive information about these deaths, but little coordination or collaboration occurs between them and, apparently, not a single entity gets "all of the information" or even receives information on "all" of the deaths.

3. A statute requiring the state children's ombudsman be notified when a child under state care dies.

4. Bring judiciary in the review process. Corrigan said the courts are almost completely uninvolved in reviewing of the deaths of children under state care.

"We've been leaving the courts completely out of the system," Corrigan observed. "When a child dies who is under state care there should be a review of that court case, regardless of whether the case has been closed."

She said the Supreme Court has taken some action already.

"The court is establishing a child death review committee," Corrigan said.

"This committee will be looking into any death of a child who is or was under court jurisdiction."

In addition, Corrigan said that this new child death review committee is scheduled to hold its first meeting this month.

Law asked Corrigan what the make up of the oversight body should be.

"I would hope it would have some child welfare authorities and maybe some prosecutors," Corrigan said.

'But, really, that would be (the Legislature's) call."

Law also asked Corrigan about privatization. The Justice said she didn't want to go there.

"I've really tried to avoid getting into the partisan issues," Corrigan responded.

As he adjourned the task force hearing, Law stressed that he does not want anyone to interpret the task

force as being critical of the Department of Human Services (DHS).

Corrigan and Law both agreed that retaining trained DHS workers would be a key step toward protecting children.

"I don't want anyone to think that this task force is in any way attacking the DHS," Law said. "Obviously,

if people go into that line of work it's because they care about children."

Law opened the hearing by stating that he wished the body holding the hearing was an official committee

of the House, rather than a Republican-only task force.

"Every child is valued in this state," Law said. "This task force is a continuation of the special committee

we had last session. I sent a letter to the Speaker about doing that again. It's one thing to have no

response to your letter for 11 days, let alone 11 months."

"So we're continuing on with this task force to try to find out why Michigan children are not adequately

protected," Law continued. "Though no system will likely be perfect, we can and should do better."

In response, Greg **BIRD**, spokesman for House Speaker Andy **DILLON** (D-Redford Twp.), said the

House Democrats are more than willing to work with the Republicans on the issue of child protection.

"As protecting our children is one of our top priorities, we would certainly be open to any

recommendations the Representative has on improving the system," Bird said. "However, we have spent

much of the year defending some of these very services from drastic cuts that Republicans have wanted to make to the department."



Suspect surrenders

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

WYOMING -- A former area man accused of neglecting a 2-month-old son who died March 26, 2006, turned himself in Tuesday to Virginia authorities. Anthony Huhn and his wife, Alisha Huhn, who lists a Wyoming address, were being held in the Virginia City Jail, according to the Virginian-Pilot online edition. It said the husband, once listed as a fugitive, turned himself in Tuesday. His wife already was in custody. Alisha Huhn is charged with neglect, while Anthony Huhn is charged with neglect and malicious wounding, court records showed. The cause of the baby's death is listed as undetermined.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Police still hope to solve slaying Someone must have helpful information in Constantine girl's killing, chief believes

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

BY REX HALL JR.

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CONSTANTINE -- Almost three weeks after a little girl's body was found lying in a cemetery, Constantine's police chief says "nobody has been eliminated yet as a suspect" in the killing of 11-year-old Jodi Parrack, and that he remains confident police will make an arrest.

"We've gotten some tips lately that have been pretty intriguing ... and make me more optimistic," Chief Mark Honeysett said Tuesday. "I think (the incident) involves someone locally here, so for that reason I'm confident we'll find out who and maybe why. I don't believe it was just someone passing through who picked her out."

A team of 40 to 50 investigators from the St. Joseph County Major Crimes Task Force and FBI had amassed nearly 450 tips in the case as of Tuesday morning, but have yet to find anyone who may have seen Jodi after she left a friend's house in the 100 block of East Third Street at about 4:45 p.m. on Nov. 8, Honeysett said.

"We're hoping that if anyone saw her after 4:45, they may have seen her with the person who killed her or who was with her when she died," he said. "I still firmly believe that someone in town did see her or has information that they don't think is important and haven't passed it along to us ... It's easier for me to believe that someone knows what happened apart from Jodi and the person who killed her."

Jodi, a fifth-grader at Riverside Elementary, was last seen riding her bike near the intersection of East Third and South Washington streets in downtown Constantine. Her mother, Valerie Carver, reported her missing at about 7 that night after Jodi failed to return home on time by 5:30 p.m., investigators have said.

Carver was with friends searching for her daughter at about 10:30 p.m. when they found Jodi dead in the Constantine Township Cemetery. Her bike was found nearby.

Jodi's death has been ruled a homicide, but the cause was still undetermined and a final autopsy report hadn't been received by police as of Tuesday, Honeysett said.

Honeysett declined to say if police have served any search warrants in the case or asked anyone to take a polygraph exam as part of the investigation.

He said tips received by police so far have ranged from callers with "no information" to those who provide "names of specific people we need to talk to." Police were continuing to prioritize the tips and following up on them, as well as doing interviews Tuesday, Honeysett said.

The St. Joseph County Prosecutor's Office issued a news release this morning indicating that the investigation into Jodi's killing is at a point where further media attention and publicity are undesired.

"We have reached the stage in the investigation where media publicity with regard to the specifics of the investigation is no longer desirable," Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Holly Curtis wrote.

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Article published Nov 28, 2007

Constantine police continue to search for child's killer

The Associated Press

CONSTANTINE — Nearly three weeks after an 11-year-old girl's body was found in a cemetery, the police chief says he is confident an arrest will be made in the case.

Jodi Parrack, a fifth-grader at Riverside Elementary School, last was seen alive riding her bicycle in the southwestern Michigan village of Constantine after leaving a friend's house around 4:45 p.m. on Nov. 8, said police Chief Mark Honeysett.

The child's mother, Valerie Carver, reported the girl missing around 7 p.m. after Jodi failed to return home. Carver was with friends searching for her daughter when they discovered the girl's body in the Constantine Township Cemetery around 10:30 p.m.

Her bike was found nearby.

"We've gotten some tips lately that have been pretty intriguing ... and make me more optimistic," the chief told the Kalamazoo Gazette for a story published today. "I think (the killing) involves someone locally here, so for that reason I'm confident we'll find out who and maybe why. I don't believe it was just someone passing through who picked her out."

A team of 40 to 50 investigators from the FBI and local law enforcement have amassed nearly 450 tips, which they are continuing to prioritize and look into, Honeysett said.

"We're hoping that if anyone saw her after 4:45, they may have seen her with the person who killed her or who was with her when she died," he said. "I still firmly believe that someone in town did see her or has information that they don't think is important and haven't passed it along to us."

Information from: Kalamazoo Gazette, <http://www.mlive.com/kzgazette>.

Nov 28, 9:04 AM EST

Teen stuck in chimney was seeking another way into locked center

ROYAL OAK, Mich. (AP) -- A teenager who got stuck in a chimney after returning to a Royal Oak social services agency wasn't sneaking in past his curfew as authorities originally thought.

An agency official says the 17-year-old arrived ahead of schedule and was looking for another way inside after finding the doors locked.

The Judson Center official tells The Detroit News most of the facility's wards were spending the holiday with friends or relatives and the few who stayed were taken to a movie by workers. Two remaining workers were picking up another ward and locked the empty building.

Authorities say they were able to pull out the teen by soaping him up. They say he suffered minor scrapes and bruises, but could have suffocated.

11-27-2007

Supreme Court Won't Hear Teen Ranch Case

For years, Michigan's Teen Ranch has been fighting to retain its Christian mission and government funding. That battle ended at the Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case.

The challenge began after the Michigan Department of Human Services refused to refer troubled kids to Teen Ranch's juvenile rehabilitation program because it is faith-based.

It's a dangerous precedent for religious-freedom cases, said Peter Sprigg, vice president for policy at the Family Research Council.

"It really opens the door for discrimination against faith-based organizations in providing social services in spite of laws that are supposed to guarantee that they have the right to participate," he told *Family News in Focus*. "Certainly that loss of funding has a serious impact on (Teen Ranch's) ability to fulfill their mission."

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Violent media's effects seen

U-M study tracks kids; recheck in adulthood finds more violence

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

BY JORDAN MILLER

The Ann Arbor News

Exposure to violent movies, television shows and video games significantly increases the risk that the viewer or player will behave aggressively in both the long and short term, according to a new University of Michigan study published Tuesday in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

It's a topic that has been debated extensively, but this is one of the first studies that shows the relation between viewing media violence and real criminal behavior, according to the study's author, L. Rowell Huesmann, a senior research scientist at the U-M Institute for Social Research.

"This is the first study that shows a relation between childhood exposure to violent TV, playing violent video games, seeing violent movies, and behaving violently enough to be incarcerated as a delinquent," said Huesmann, a professor of communication studies and psychology.

Huesmann and his team followed a group of children for three years as they moved through middle childhood. They found increasing rates of aggression for both boys and girls who watched more television violence, even when taking into account initial aggressive tendencies and other background factors. A 15-year follow-up of those children showed that those who habitually watched violent media grew up to be more aggressive young adults.

Huesmann also cited many independent studies and experiments with similar results, stating that the majority of one-shot survey studies have shown that children who watch more media violence on a daily basis behave more aggressively on a daily basis. In another experiment cited, both children and adults who watched a violent movie showed significantly more aggression than the children and adults who watched a nonviolent movie when playing a physical game immediately after watching the films.

Video games were also addressed in the study, although experiments involving exposure to violent games are not as extensive or long-term.

"Because players of violent video games are not just observers but also 'active' participants in violent actions and are generally reinforced for using violence to gain desired goals, the effects on stimulating long-term increases in violent behavior should be even greater for video games than for TV, movies or Internet displays of violence," Huesmann wrote in the study.

Josh Williams, owner of Digital Ops gaming center on Liberty Street in Ann Arbor, said he finds the article "disheartening," especially because his store and the social gaming it offers provide a haven for some kids who might not otherwise fit in or have an opportunity to socialize.

"I can't even begin to tell you the number of parents we've had come in here, thanking us for giving their kids a safe place to do something fun and creative," Williams said. "We've provided a place for a lot of 13- to 18-year-old kids who might not have had another place to go."

Zach Wigal, a 17-year-old Saline High School student who is planning a Halo video game tournament to benefit charity, said that he disagrees that playing violent games begets violence.

"I've been playing video games since I remember, including violent games," Wigal said. "Have I seen someone get super mad? Yes, but only in the sense that they're getting beat down and they're pretty mad. It's all in good fun."

However, Wigal said he thinks that kids who might be prone to violence could be influenced by what they see or do when they play these games.

"If you come out of a comedy club, if the comedian was good, you're usually in a happy mood, you're laughing," he explained. "I think with any form of media, whether it be comedy, music, video games, there's always a certain element of influence."

Jordan Miller can be reached at jmiller@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6679.

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Shelter hires director

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

By Kristin Longley

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A woman who has experience working for local nonprofits is the new executive director of the AWARE shelter.

Rebecca Filip, 50, was hired last week for the full-time position. The Summit Township resident was most recently a therapist at Bridgeway Center. She was once executive director at both Jackson Affordable Housing and what is now disAbility Connections.

Filip, a limited licensed professional counselor, also has experience with corrections programs and substance-abuse counseling, and has worked with Family Service & Children's Aid.

AWARE board President Travis Fojtasek said Filip's strong local ties helped her stand out among the 39 candidates.

"Her connections within the community, we felt, were an important asset to have," he said. "She also has a lot of experience with nonprofits."

Filip replaces Shirley Pascal, who has served temporarily since June when former director Nicole Kirksey left. Pascal preceded Kirksey as director for nearly 10 years.

AWARE provides services such as crisis intervention, group counseling and emergency housing for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Filip said she has been familiar with AWARE for years and was involved with its annual historic home tour fundraiser. She said she's looking forward to continuing its life-changing services.

"(AWARE) can definitely save people's lives," she said. "It's a cause I support, and it's a very good program in Jackson."

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Economy pressures needy's food sources

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

If you were surprised by recent news that Michigan's charities are scrambling in the face of a tough economy, you haven't been paying attention.

Of the 136 nonprofits in this state responding to a GuideStar survey, 69 percent reported increased demand for their services. And about half reported the same or lower contributions.

Local food banks are one place where demand is most visible. Kimberly Green, who runs the emergency food bank for Catholic Social Services, told The News that demand has at least doubled from last year. Food Gatherers, a nonprofit that supplies many food banks in the area, reports similar increases.

"Sites that were serving 20 families are serving 40 now," said Marti Lachapell, Food Gatherers' director of agency relations. "We're doubling, tripling in some cases to the point where we're having to talk to congregations about how to continue to serve the people they're serving, because the numbers are going up and the resources really aren't."

The holiday season is a time when many people have a heightened awareness of those in need. Food drives at schools, churches and other community organizations are helping fill demand - demand that doesn't evaporate after the holidays.

Nonprofit leaders point to Michigan's economy as the main factor in all this. The state's unemployment rate of 7.7 percent is the highest in the country. Even locally, where the jobless rate is lower - around 5 percent for Washtenaw County - few are untouched by the troubled auto industry, Pfizer's closing of its large Ann Arbor facility, the stuttering housing market and overall economic slowdown.

In many ways, the strength of a community - particularly during hard times - is reflected in its ability to support those most in need. Our community is being asked to prove its strength, and each of us must ask: "How can I help?"

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Face of Hunger goal biggest for food bank

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

By Holly Klaft

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FLINT - Tough economic times haven't limited the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan's reach toward higher fundraising goals.

The nonprofit agency was expected to announce today its ambitious goal to raise \$650,000 during the monthlong Face of Hunger holiday campaign.

It's the Flint-based food bank's highest campaign goal ever, and the need has never been greater, said food bank President Bill Kerr.

"The economic conditions for our community this year are the most challenging we've ever faced," Kerr said. "We're looking at a year with the greatest amount of need we've ever had and the most competitive for the philanthropic dollar."

The funds will be used to help meet the rising community need and supply the food bank's nearly 400 partner agencies with a variety of goods at a greatly discounted price.

Collection envelopes will be distributed Friday in The Flint Journal, and donations can be made anytime at www.fbem.org/support.htm.

Every dollar donated through the campaign allows the food bank to buy \$14 worth of food and other items to distribute to its agencies in 22 counties.

Kerr estimated the food bank brought in \$25,000 in donations before the launch of the campaign.

Early donations, such as the \$10,500 handed over by Citizens Bank, have helped get this year's fundraising efforts rolling, Kerr said.

However, the food bank is still looking to the community to help meet this year's goal.

Representatives from businesses and organizations that support the food bank, including The State Bank and Kroger, were expected to speak about giving to the food bank for today's kick-off.

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Theater students donate 1,558 pounds of food

Hometown Headlines

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

Journal Staff Writer

BENTLEY - Thespian troupes from Bentley High School and Bentley Middle School collected 1,558 pounds of food for local charitable programs.

The collections were part of national community service done by the International Thespian Society, a division of the Educational Theatre Association.

Bentley students joined 225 similar groups from around the country in the fifth annual "Trick or Treat So Kids Can Eat" program.

A total of 270,345 pounds of canned and nonperishable food was collected this year nationally.

- James L. Smith

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Homeless men tell how friend was slain

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

By Barton Deiters

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- They shared life on the streets. They shared a safe spot to sleep under a highway viaduct and, on the morning before they watched one of their friends bleed to death, the four men shared a 40-ounce beer at a West Side park.

Tuesday, the three men overcame their fear of retribution to seek justice for their slain friend, Richard Goss, 46, who they say had his throat slashed by Jamie Lee Hoffner.

"He told me he loved me and please don't let him die," said Bryan McAlery, who held Goss July 7 as he bled to death. "I kept trying to stop it but I couldn't."

The tall man with the ragged beard broke into tears on the Grand Rapids District Court witness stand as he spoke of his friend. McAlery, called "Moose" by Goss, testified at the probable cause hearing for Hoffner, who now will face felony charges of open murder and witness intimidation in Kent County Circuit Court.

McAlery said he and Goss met friends Joe Black and Henry Ames and they sat and drank on a bench at Douglas Park around 7:30 a.m.

Each of the men described Goss as one of their best friends.

As the four drank beer, they said Hoffner, 32, appeared and offered some of them a sip from the gin bottle he was carrying.

When one of the men asked for a sip, Hoffner allegedly poured some of the booze on McAlery and Goss.

Goss stood up and attempted to leave when Hoffner pulled out a knife and slashed at Goss' throat, the men testified. A coroner's exam determined it was a cut to the throat that killed Goss.

Ames ran to call 911. McAlery said that while Hoffner seemed stunned to see Goss bleeding, he was cognizant enough to tell McAlery not to call police or "you're next."

Grand Rapids police officer Josh Cornell responded to the call about the alleged stabbing and testified he saw Hoffner walking on Gold Avenue NW, wearing a T-shirt spotted with blood.

Cornell said he found a bloody knife on Hoffner. The state police laboratory tested the stains on Hoffner's T-shirt and knife and determined it matched DNA from Goss, authorities said.

As he listened to testimony, Hoffner at first smiled and shook his head, but by the end of the hearing, he had put his head down on the table in front of him.

District Judge Donald Passenger determined there was enough evidence to allow Hoffner to be bound over to Circuit Court on the murder charge. Hoffner faces mandatory life in prison if convicted.

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Published November 28, 2007

Jobless rate dips to 5.4% for region

Jeremy W. Steele
Lansing State Journal

The Lansing region's jobless rate dropped slightly to 5.4 percent in October, according to data released Tuesday by the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth.

That was 0.2 percentage points better than the seasonally unadjusted rate a year earlier. It also was an improvement from September's 5.8 percent unemployment rate.

Total employment for October was 236,400, down 100 from a year earlier but up 1,200 from September. The labor force - people working or actively looking for work - was at 250,000. That was down 500 from a year earlier but up 300 from September.

October payroll data showed area employers added 1,800 jobs since September with gains largely attributed to government jobs, offsetting losses in manufacturing and hospitality sectors.

Contact Jeremy W. Steele at 377-1015 or jwsteele@lsj.com.

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Article published Nov 28, 2007

Wal-Mart fills red kettles with \$1 million check

Stephanie Antonian Rutherford

The Enquirer

On Tuesday, Salvation Army bells rang at every Wal-Mart across the nation — and Battle Creek was the center of it all.

Lee Scott, chief executive officer of Wal-Mart Stores Inc., the world's largest retailer, was at the Battle Creek Wal-Mart on B Drive North to announce a \$1 million national donation to the Salvation Army.

Scott was joined by Kellogg Co. President and CEO David Mackay, who also presented a \$250,000 check to the Salvation Army. About half of Kellogg's donation will be used at the local chapter, said Tim Knowlton, Kellogg's vice president for corporate social responsibility.

"The Salvation Army does tremendous work," Mackay said. "Kellogg is proud to support them."

Kellogg's donation was matched by battery maker Rayovac. Kent Hussey, CEO of Spectrum Brands, Rayovac's parent company, was on hand to present a \$250,000 national donation.

According to a Wal-Mart media spokesperson, the company chose Battle Creek for the announcement because it coincided with a local business visit by Scott. Last year's event was held in Bentonville, Ark., home to Wal-Mart's world headquarters.

"Our associates and customers have provided tremendous support to the Salvation Army over the years," Scott said. "We consider the organization to be one of our closest, most important partners."

After posing for pictures and greeting Wal-Mart employees, Scott rang the red kettle bell alongside Salvation Army National Commander Israel Gaither and Mackay.

Last year, the Salvation Army collected a record \$30 million in front of Wal-Mart stores and Sam's Club locations, the most raised by any partner, Gaither said.

Gaither called the \$1.5 million in donations from Wal-Mart, Kellogg and Rayovac a "tremendous start" to the yearly Christmas Red Kettle campaign.

"Need continues to grow," Gaither said. "Their support helps ensure the pain of poverty is eased for the millions we serve."

Funds donated by customers helped the Salvation Army serve 35 million people by providing basic social services such as food, shelter, clothing and financial assistance, Battle Creek Salvation Army Major Thomas Riggs said.

Watching as Mayor Mark Behnke presented Scott a key to Battle Creek, local Wal-Mart employee Gail Greenway couldn't contain her excitement.

"This is such an honor to have (Scott) here in Battle Creek," said Greenway, who has worked for Wal-Mart for nine years. "I wouldn't stand out here and freeze for just anybody, but this is so exciting that I'm warm inside."

Stephanie Antonian Rutherford can be reached at 966-0665 or srutherford@battlecr.gannett.com.

Niles Daily Star

ONLINE EDITION

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Become an angel to a child

By ERIKA PICKLES / Niles Daily Star
Wednesday, November 28, 2007 11:39 AM EST

NILES - Helping a child in need this Christmas has never been easier thanks to the Angel Tree.

Signal Travel of Niles, located at 219 E. Main St., is encouraging residents of the community to help make a difference this holiday season by helping to make this Christmas brighter for a young boy or girl who may not be as fortunate.

"There is no cost for the tag. All you do is come in to the office, pick a child's name off the tree and their age is listed as well as a few gifts they would like for Christmas," Michele Boyd, president of Signal Travel said.

After the gifts are bought, they may be wrapped and brought back to Signal Travel, where they will be delivered to the Salvation Army and taken to the child the week of Christmas. Gift items should be brought in no later than Friday, Dec. 14. They may also be taken directly to the Salvation Army office, 424 N. 15th St. no later than Dec. 16.

Along with the Angel Tree, Signal Travel also has a food barrel, which allows people to bring in non-perishable food items which will be assorted in various Christmas food baskets for families in need.

"With us being downtown, we figured this was a more convenient way for people to come. Our office has adopted families in the past and we thought the Angel tree was another way to reach out and help the community," Boyd added.